



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Review of Irmgard Enzinger: Ausdruck und Eindruck. Zum chinesischen Verständnis der Sinne

Citation for published version:

Gentz, J 2009, 'Review of Irmgard Enzinger: Ausdruck und Eindruck. Zum chinesischen Verständnis der Sinne', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 95, no. 1-3, pp. 204-209. <https://doi.org/10.1163/008254309X12586659061640>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1163/008254309X12586659061640](https://doi.org/10.1163/008254309X12586659061640)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

T'oung Pao

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Gentz, J. (2009). Review of Irmgard Enzinger: Ausdruck und Eindruck. Zum chinesischen Verständnis der Sinne. T'oung Pao, 95(1-3), 204-209doi: 10.1163/008254309X12586659061640

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Ausdruck und Eindruck: Zum chinesischen Verständnis der Sinne. By Irmgard Enzinger, Lun Wen—Studien zur Geistesgeschichte und Literatur in China, vol. 10. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2007. 364 pp. ISBN 978-3-447-05456-0 (pb)

“... doch gibt es einen Parallelismus zwischen den ‘5 Eingeweiden’ (Lungen, Niere, Galle, Leber, Milz) als ‘inneren’ und den 5 Sinnen als ‘äußeren Regulatoren’” (... there exists, however, a parallelism between the ‘five viscera’ [lungs, kidneys, gall, liver, spleen] as ‘inward’ and the 5 senses as ‘outward regulators’).

It is against the depiction of the Chinese concept of the senses in passages like this one, found in Eckart Scheerer’s article on the senses in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (vol. 9, 1995, p. 827), and in the sources of this article—Alfred Forke (*Geschichte der alten chinesischen Philosophie*, 1927), Feng Yu-lan/Bodde (*History of Chinese Philosophy*, 1952) and Joseph Needham (*Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 2, 1956)—that Irmgard Enzinger’s book is written. Enzinger thus starts her book with a critique of the insufficiency of the sinological research on Chinese conceptions of what in the West is commonly understood as the five senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin), quoting selected passages from Western writings on Chinese philosophy and medicine. In this introductory critical survey the author does not attempt to explain such Western (mis-)conceptions in the broader context of a history of the adoption of ideas; they are rather taken as a starting point into an investigation which in turn chooses to focus on traditional Chinese primary sources to provide the many non-sinological, but also the sinological, readers with new and more adequate insights into Chinese traditional concepts of the senses. In the author’s view Chinese traditional thought does not separate the senses from the mind but instead assumes a unity of dual concepts and a complementarity of oppositions, for example a unity of thought and feeling that only recently has become an attractive modern concept in the West.

From this Chinese perspective Enzinger tries to gain some inspiration and new unexpected views on the topic of the senses. Since many of the more influential writers on the Chinese senses are scholars trained in Western medicine or philosophy, not sinologists, and thus have to base their knowledge of Chinese body concepts on sinological sources, she considers it an important task for sinologists to provide these readers with sound information based on detailed research into Chinese primary sources. A first step in that direction, according to her, has been taken by Jane Geaney with her book *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought*.¹ Since, however, in Enzinger’s view Geaney’s analysis is still too much focused on the Western concept of the senses, she attempts to take the consequent step of a more radical investigation into the diversity and divergent conceptualizations in existence in a field that in many aspects exceeds the limits of our Western definition of “the senses”.

¹) Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part (pp. 19-101) explores two central Chinese traditional expressions for what is called the "five senses" in the West: "Five Officers" (*wu guan*) and "Seven Orifices" (*qi qiao*). These expressions are analyzed in different discursive contexts, starting from their earliest occurrences in pre-Qin times. The discussion of the *wu guan* reflects the relevance of the semantics of the number five as well as of the term *guan* (official) for an understanding of this concept. It introduces to the correlative thought of the Five Phases (*wu xing*), takes into account the concept of the Five Concerns (*wu shi*) in the "Hongfan" chapter of the *Shangshu*, and shows the relation of these early concepts to the concept of the *wu guan*. In contrast to the idea of Seven Orifices, which appears for the first time in the *Zhuangzi* and refers to the facial orifices of the senses only, the concept of Five Officers is associated with the human body as a whole and can also be related to the administrative realm. Further relations to other realms are explored in this first part of the book, so that the concepts are discussed within the different connotative entanglements of such different fields as epistemology, moral philosophy, physiognomy, medicine, *qi*-theories, geomancy, military strategy, divination, ritual, astronomy, astrology and numerology, with their respective historical and theoretical contexts. The analysis is entirely based on the central passages in early primary sources that make use of the expressions under discussion. It owes its strength to the combination of a clear historical perspective on the sources, for which the author always tries to provide dates and discursive contexts, and a constant attempt to relate the passages to one another, find a common meaning, and define a semantic field for the expression under consideration that might also shed some light on the understanding of the five senses in a critical reflection on the European terminology. I do not know of any other introduction to the terms "Five Officers" and "Seven Orifices", especially in their early usage, of comparable historical profoundness, interpretative clearness, complexity of sources and academic thoroughness. Short summaries at the end of each part are very helpful for the reader to recall the results before proceeding to the next field of investigation.

Yet, a few critical remarks need to be added. Some of the interpretative decisions are not entirely intelligible. First of all, is it sensible to base an analysis of the Chinese understanding of the human senses on two linguistic expressions and proceed in a rather philological way to explore all the different contextual usages and connotations of these expressions, and then draw conclusions on the Chinese understanding of the human senses in general? If in Enzinger's view Geaney's approach is too much focused on the Western concept of the senses, then her own approach submits, and thereby limits, itself entirely to these two linguistic expressions and hence curtails her analysis of the linguistic richness of concepts, notions, terms and expressions which also relate to, and are used to talk about, the senses, as Geaney's book shows more clearly, and which she sacrifices in favour of two historically quite inconsistent philosophical notions. Second, the selection of the adduced passages is not explained. There is no critical reflection about how comprehensive the selection of the chosen passages is, or in which respect they

are relevant and crucial for the analysis of the two concepts involved. Third, although Foucault's discourse theory is mentioned as an important methodological device in the introduction (p. 17), the interpretation of the passages does not analyse them as discourses but in most cases tries to give the "real" meaning of the analysed concept.

The second part (pp. 103-177) starts with a reflection on the first point of the critique above and thereby explains its own entirely different approach to the Chinese understanding of the human senses. This second part proceeds to look at the entries that concern the individual sense organs listed under the broader categories "humans" and "human affairs" in two important encyclopaedias (*leishu*), the *Yiwen leiju* and the *Taiping yulan*. The fact that the senses listed in both *leishu* are not consistent either with the "Five Officers" or with the "Seven Orifices", not even in their numbers (four and six), clearly reveals that the two concepts analysed in the first part of the book cannot be taken as representative, perhaps not even as very important, regarding the Chinese understanding of the human senses. This contradiction, however, is not explored critically by the author, and the selection of these two new starting points for a new analysis, going in great detail through all the entries and again trying to find a common ground of meaning through an intelligent interpretation of the passages involved, encounters the same methodological problems as the selection of the two expressions discussed in the first part.

Enzinger explains that, instead of randomly analyzing whatever kind of classical Chinese texts on the senses, she prefers to look at selections of such texts made by Chinese philologists in the early Tang and early Song. Although this decision is sensible in terms of saving work and gaining a further Chinese discourse perspective, the question again arises of why the author decided to chose these particular *leishu* among so many others, and which new particular set of discourses we are dealing with here, and why. Enzinger claims that she chose the *Yiwen leiju* because it is historically the first *leishu* and therefore provides a lot of informative material. The *Taiping Yulan* in turn qualifies as a second source for comparison because, in a sequence of rather heterogeneous *leishu*, it can be seen as the direct follower of the *Yiwen leiju* (p. 12). When the aim is to explore the Chinese understanding of human senses, however, the question should rather be which *leishu* can be taken as the most *representative* for a general and broad understanding of the senses, since it cannot be assumed that this is necessarily the case of the oldest ones. Enzinger is aware of the fact that *leishu* material reflects neither popular, local and oral traditions nor the important Buddhist and Daoist concepts of the human body and senses. She is convinced, however, that the material under investigation is relevant enough to reflect basic lines of the Chinese discourse on the senses (pp. 15-16).

Yet she does not inform the reader that, for example, the senses in the *Taiping yulan* are classified within the larger category of the human body, where the sequence merely follows the line from the head downwards, and that the senses do not form a distinct group but are only parts of a rather descriptive sequence

of the human head—crown, forehead, face, eyebrows, ear, eye, cheeks, nose, nose bridge, mouth, tongue, lips, grinder, incisor, and so forth. This calls into question the relevance of the eyebrows as one of the crucial senses. The only reason for including them in the analysis is the fact that from the tenth century A.D. they are mentioned in physiognomic works as one of the Five Officers. But the function of the physiognomic officers is entirely an expressive one, it does not have any receptive aspect, which again is crucial for any definition of the senses in the Western discourse. The fact that the *Yiwen leiju* has no entry on the eyebrows and that in the *Taiping yulan* the eyebrows are listed in a sequence together with forehead, cheeks, lips and teeth does not support the argument that the eyebrows should be taken into consideration when the Chinese understanding of the senses is discussed. If the eyebrows are brought into the discussion of senses because they are mentioned in late physiognomic works as one of the Five Officers, then the heart and body should also be taken into consideration since the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi* both mention the heart (pp. 47, 52), and the *Xunzi* also the body (p. 48), as one of the Five Officers. Jane Geaney, for her part, regards the heart as one of the major players in ancient Chinese sensorial epistemology.

These problems reflect the more general one of equalizing the Western concept of the Five Senses with the Chinese concept of the Five Officers. Following the length of the entries on the “Officials” in the two *leishu*: eyes, ears, mouth, tongue (listed in both *leishu*), nose, and eyebrows (listed only in the *Taiping yulan*), Enzinger structures her second part according to these six “senses”. At the beginning of each sub-part of the second chapter she first gives a summary of the characterisations of the individual sense considered and of the main features, aspects, meanings and functions associated with it in both *leishu*. Then in a second step she describes the specificities in each of the *leishu*, and at the end provides a résumé of the elements in common and specific differences in the depiction of the individual senses in the two *leishu*. The analysis of the *leishu* quotes is further divided into the categories of expression (*Ausdruck*) and reception (*Aufnahme*), which she makes out as two important aspects of differentiation in the Chinese understanding of the senses. Further categories are vulnerability (*Verletzlichkeit*) and oddness (*Merkwürdigkeit*). Within this analytical framework Enzinger then cites a selection of anecdotes from the *leishu* to illustrate the semantic field associated with each of the senses. Since many of the quotes making up the entries on the senses can be found in both *leishu*, there is a great amount of overlapping definitions. In the *Taiping yulan*, however, Enzinger discovers a conspicuous increase in the reference to violent situations to characterize the senses, which she explains by the disengagement of the *Taiping yulan* with poetic language (p. 182).

The conclusion of the second chapter is mainly a summary. One of the main results is the discovery that, in contrast to Western conceptions viewing the five senses as instruments through which information on the outside world can be gathered, the Chinese understand the senses as corresponding organs that are transferring mutual influences between the inside and outside worlds (the things,

wu) of the human being. The senses are conceptualized as mutually related carriers of particular functions rather than as singular material entities.

Enzinger notes two shifts in the historical understanding of the senses, one in Han and one in Tang times. Pre-Qin philosophy focused on the relationship of the Five Officers with one another and with the heart, and concentrated both on the regulative functions of the Officers to create order and on the receptive aspect of the senses. From Han times onwards, the expressive aspect of the senses for medical purposes, and from Tang times also for physiognomic purposes, becomes important as well. In the *leishu* a hierarchical order of the senses can be detected: the visual sense as well as speech appear to be dominant. Apart from these general insights the study yields a great number of details associated to the senses.

More of these details are accessible through the annotated translation of the sense-related parts of the two *leishu* that forms the third part of the book (pp. 185-280). The footnotes give precise source references and sometimes provide the context of the quotations or philological discussions. This third part provides a very comfortable overview of the *leishu* entries, of their specific style, systematization and coherence, which is highly valuable both as an introduction to *leishu* entries and to the topics discussed. This completes a book which is an extremely helpful and comprehensive introduction to the complex field of Chinese notions of something similar to the European five senses and is based on the translation and analysis of a huge amount of primary source material. In this respect it realizes what it promised to do at the beginning.

We do not find, however, much further theoretical reflection in the sense of cultural theory or comparative analysis. The only comparative references provided are modern European notions of the five senses, which is always an uneven and unfair approach to classical Chinese notions and suggests cultural gaps which to a large extent reflect problems of historical displacement. The book is thus not so much a comparative study than a pure sinological work whose strength lies in its presentation of a great range and wide spectrum of Chinese thoughts on the senses. The historical contexts and sources of these thoughts are always indicated, and at the end of the book there is a very helpful list of all the works cited in the *leishu*; but the historical dimension is weak in the analysis of the contents. Enzinger focuses her analysis more on the attempt to find general commonalities in her highly diverse material and to boil the varieties down to some Chinese essential understanding of the senses that might be set in opposition to Western modern notions. She does not set up a historical perspective for the development of the manifold notions she discusses, nor does she try to systematize the rather diverse conceptions of senses within different systems of thought, as does for example Paul Unschuld in his *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas*,² a book that appears in the bibliography at the end of the work. What we do not find in the bibliography is Chinese secondary literature on the subject: only Chinese primary

²⁾ Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988.

sources and reference works are listed, and not a single study in Japanese. I wonder why the author, who aims to explore the Chinese views, has not taken a look at the Chinese and Japanese discussions of the field and has restricted herself entirely to the Western discourse. There is a glossary, but no index.

Despite these shortcomings, the great merit of this rich book is to provide the academic community with abundant primary source materials related to the senses, and thus to open the field to further research. Enzinger's book is a first step into a field which is relevant not only for sinological research but also for disciplines like medicine, philosophy, cognitive science and cultural studies. As she herself writes at the end of her conclusion, some aspects of the Chinese figures of thought may still be hidden to our understanding. This study invites its readers to pursue the critical discussion.

Joachim Gentz, University of Edinburgh